BOOK TWO OF TWO

RUINS™

MARVEL

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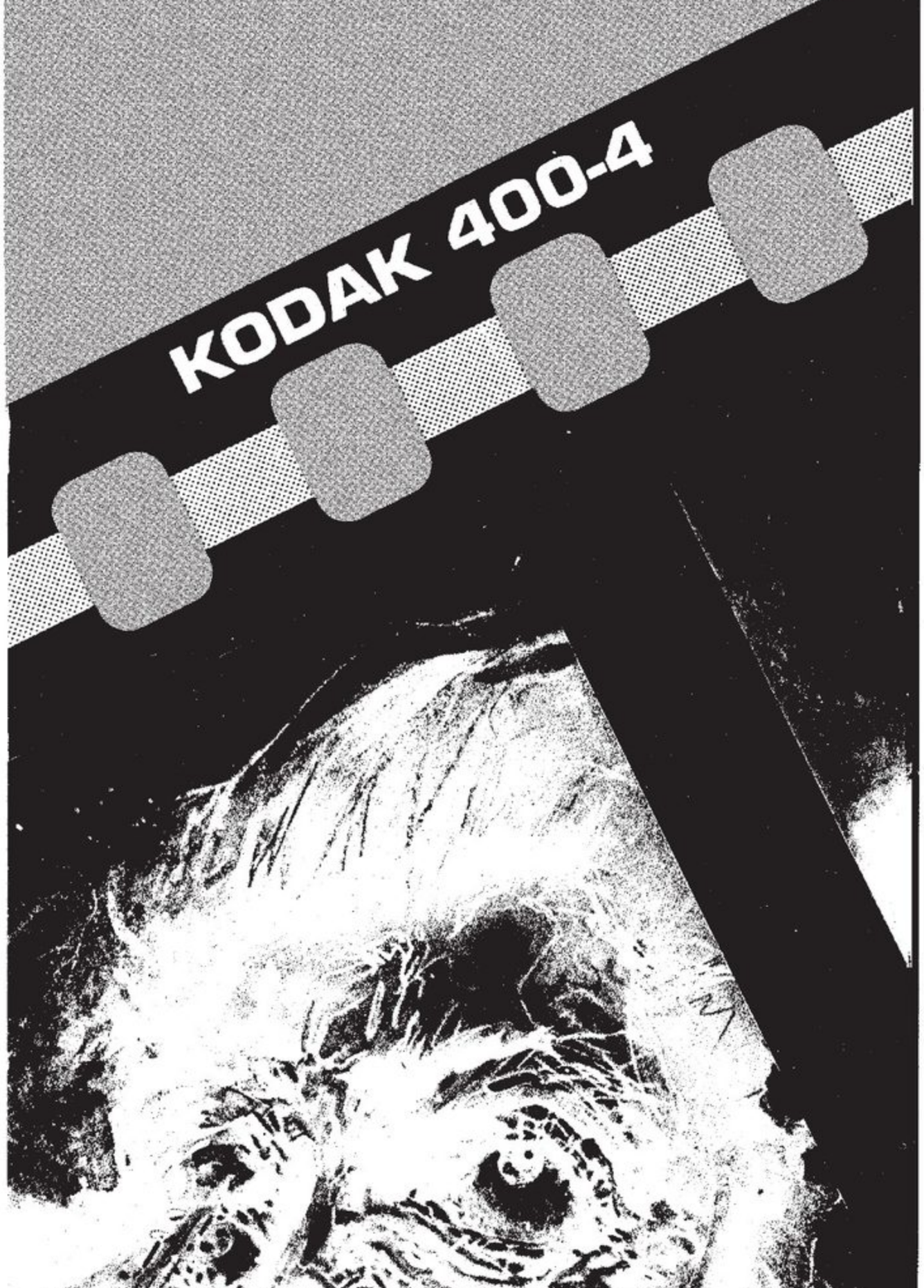

RUINS

BOOK TWO: "WOMEN IN FLIGHT"

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FOR EVERY KISS,
A BULLET IN THE FACE,

FOR EVERY ACTION,
A REACTION.

FOR EVERY EVENT,
THERE EXISTS IN POTENTIAL
A MIRROR EVENT,
AN EXACTLY OPPOSITE POSSIBILITY.

IF THE WORLD YOU KNOW
IS ONE OF MARVELS,
WHERE MEN WITHOUT FEAR
FACE HORROR UNARMED,
AND WOMEN IN FLIGHT
RIDE THE UPPER REACHES
OF THE WEATHER...

...THEN, ONLY A MISSTEP
OR A STOPPED HEARTBEAT AWAY,
IS A WORLD OF RUINS.

MY GOD.

DID YOU *SEE* THAT? OUT *THERE?*

I'M **PHIL SHELDON,** *AND I'M IN SEARCH OF THE* **WEIRD.**

EXCUSE ME? HELLO?

MISS *DARKHÖLME,* WASN'T IT? *EXCUSE* ME?

NN
NNONO

NO NO NO NO NO

MEN IN BLACK BOARDED THE PLANE FOLLOWING THE EMERGENCY LANDING. THEY TOOK MISS DARKHÖLME AWAY.

THEY CALLED HER A "SHAPESHIFTER" AND SAID THAT BEING SO MANY PEOPLE IN A SHORT SPACE OF TIME GAVE HER A MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER.

THEY SAID THE **PILLS** WOULD'VE STOPPED HER BRAIN FROM IMPLODING, IF SHE'D REMEMBERED TO **TAKE** THEM...

MY LEFT ARM ITCHES.

I DRY-SWALLOW TWO PILLS, DRY MY EYES, AND JOIN THE QUEUE TO DEPLANE.

RECOVERED, I SHOUT AT MYSELF FOR NOT BEING A PROFESSIONAL, AND GETTING MY CAMERA OUT.

HERE I AM, BLOWING MY TWILIGHT YEARS RESEARCHING A BOOK ON THE WAY THINGS CHANGED--

DETHRONE

--THE WAY THE PARANORMAL STUFF THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING SINCE '61 HAS ALWAYS GONE WRONG--

--THE GOVERNMENT GUY SHOVES THAT HIPPIE AND I HEAR THE SOUND OF BREAKING GLASS AND METAL FROM OVER HERE--

ANIMAL INSTINCT HAS ME RUNNING ACROSS THE AIR-FIELD IN THE GENERAL DIREC-TION OF **AWAY**--

--BUT THE **PHOTOJOURNALIST** IN ME PUTS THE **CAMERA** ON THE SCENE--

--THE SHOTS WILL LATER BE **STOLEN** FROM ME BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS FROM THE **RECOVERY TEAM** THE **WHITE HOUSE** CHOPPERS IN.

BOMB!

BOMB!

AFTERWARDS, A SPECIALIST TELLS ME THE WEIRD **MACHINERY** AROUND THE HIPPIE **WASN'T** A BOMB--

--BUT SOME HOME-MADE **DEGAUSSING** KIT, TO SUPPRESS **MAGNETIC** FIELDS--

--THE IDIOT SMASHED IT WHEN HE SHOVED THE HIPPIE OUT OF THE WAY--

--AND NOW HE'S SCREAMING LIKE A BABY, THE IRONS IN HIS BLOOD BEING SUCKED OUT THROUGH HIS FLESH--

--A **FILLING** RIPS AWAY FROM ITS SETTING, SMASHING TWO PERFECTLY GOOD TEETH AS IT GOES--

--COULDN'T HIT THE BLOODY **DENTURES**, COULD IT?

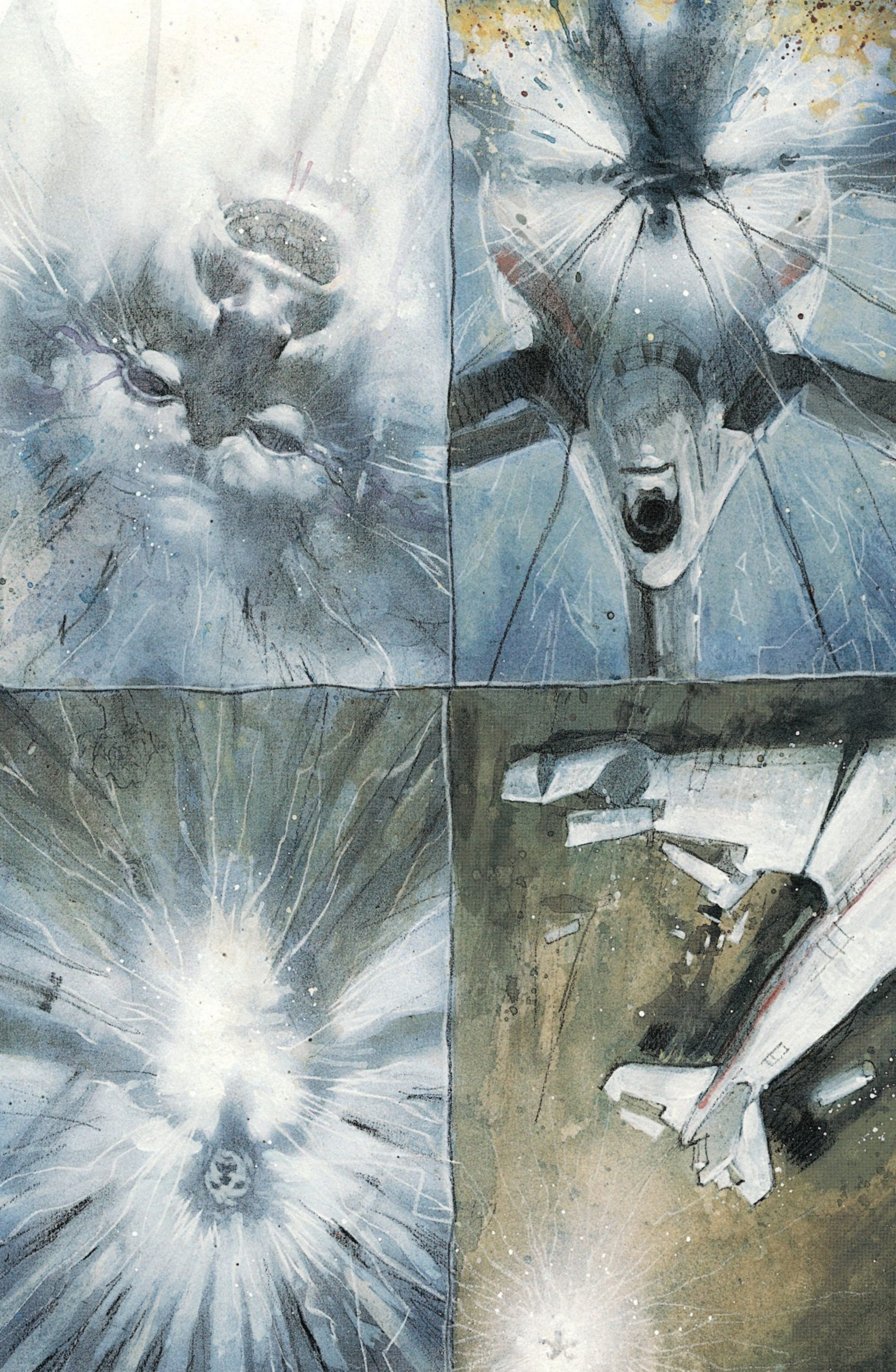
HERE'S A **WAILING**, A WRENCHING OF STEEL FROM BENEATH THE PLANE, AS ALL OF A SUDDEN I KNOW HOW THIS IS GOING TO **END**--

--I RAISE MY CAMERA ANYWAY, LIKE A **PROFESSIONAL**--

--AND I SEE SOMETHING I RELIVE EVERY TIME I CLOSE MY EYES.

THE IDIOT WHO STARTED IT, TOO CLOSE TO THE MAGNETISM--

--THE MEDICS TELL ME IT WAS A MASSIVE **NEURAL HEMORRHAGE** BROUGHT ON BY THE INTENSE ELECTROMAGNETICS--



THE DAYS MOVE SO QUICKLY FOR ME NOW.

I THINK I'M IN TEXAS.

DON'T USUALLY ALLOW JOURNALISTS ACCESS, Mr. SHELDON, BUT I HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF YOUR WORK FROM WHEN I LIVED IN NEW YORK--

--RECKON YOU WOULD GET SOME RIGHT FINE PHOTOGRAPHS FOR THE BUGLE HERE--

--PARTICULARLY HERE ON THE SHOCK CORRIDOR, Eh?

WAKE UP, YOU BUNCHA MOTHERS--

--THIS HERE'S THE SUMMERS BOY--

--INCINERATED HIS FAMILY WITH HIS EYES.

HAD TO BLIND THE BOY TO GET THEM EYEBEAMS UNDER CONTROL.

DIDN'T WE, BOY? HAD TO BLIND YOU.

IS--
IS THE *PRESIDENT* HERE?
HERE?

THE BOY DON'T *REMEMBER* TOO GOOD NO MORE.
"SHOCK "CORRIDOR"--IT'S A LITTLE *JOKE,* Y'SEE...

AAAA!

...THERE'S SOMETHING IN HERE TO SHOCK *EVERYONE,* Mr. SHELDON.
THE WRETCHED, THE HUNGRY, THE MUTANTS, THE CANNIBALS, THE BASTARDS...

THE *WEIRD,* MISTER SHELDON, THE *WEIRD.*
TAKE LI'L *KITTY* HERE. SHE DOES THIS *INTANGIBLE* THING, FANTASTIC T' *SEE*--
--BUT LAST TIME SHE TRIED *ESCAPING,* SHE GOT *SOLID* AGAIN IN THE CELL *DOOR.* LOST THREE FEET O' *INTESTINE.*

WHY DID THE BOY THINK THE *PRESIDENT* WAS COMING?

OL' PRESIDENT X COMES DOWN TO *VISIT* SOMETIMES.

SOMETIMES HE JUST *SITS* HERE IN HIS CHAIR AND *STARES* AT 'EM, KINDA *SAD*...

OTHER TIMES-- *LORDY,* THE THINGS HE *SAYS* TO 'EM LEAVES 'EM ALL *SOBBING* AND THROWIN' *UP*...

ONE TIME I REMEMBER, HE DROPPED HIS PANTS AND SCREAMS AT 'EM, "YOU ALL CAME FROM *THIS!*"

HAH! FANTASTIC T'SEE!

Oh, NOW *THAT'S* FOR QUICKIE'S OWN *GOOD,* MISTER SHELDON. DON'T GO FEELING *SORRY* FOR HIM.

WARDEN FISK, WHY ARE YOU *KEEPING* THESE ...*PARANORMALS* HERE?

BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN TOLD TO *DO*.

BECAUSE THAT'S THE WAY IT *IS*.

THE *PRESIDENT*, Y'SEE, HE *KNOWS*.

HE *KEEPS* IT THIS WAY. IT'S THE WAY HE *WANTS* IT.

ALL *LOCKED UP*. *QUIETLY*.

YOU HEARD ABOUT THIS PLACE IN *RUMORS*, I KNOW. RUMORS DON'T *HURT* ANYTHING, MISTER SHELDON.

NOW LET'S GO AND COLLECT YOUR *CAMERA* AND SEE YOU ON YOUR WAY.

THE PRESIDENT SAID I SHOULD EXTEND YOU EVERY COURTESY, AFTER ALL.

HE DIDN'T WANT YOU TO BRING NO PROOF OUT, BUT HE SAID HE WANTED TO GRANT A DYING MAN HIS LAST REQUEST.

I WALK FOR A WHILE, AIMLESS, HOPING TO GET AWAY FROM DEATH IN MY MEANDERING.

I FIND MYSELF BY A LAKE WITH A SURFACE LIKE OLD-GLASS, ALL STILLNESS AND STRANGE RIPPLES.

I IMAGINE THAT IF I DROPPED A STONE IN IT, THE WAVES IT MADE WOULD BE PERFECT CIRCLES, TAKING EASY HOURS TO MOVE OUT, EVENTUALLY TOUCHING ALL SIDES OF THE LAKE.

NEURAL HAEMM
BRAIN RIPPED OPEN & FELL OUT THROUGH EYES & MOUTH

THESE PEOPLE, THESE PARANORMAL RUINS OF MEN -- **THEY** WERE DROPPED ON THE **WORLD** LIKE A STONE.

THEIR SHOCKWAVES HAVE TOUCHED ALL EDGES OF MY WORLD.

MISTER?

TH-THANK YOU.

YOU LOOKED ALL ALONE.

SO I GOT YOU A FLOWER 'COS THEY'RE ALIVE AND CAN BE COMPANY.

MY MOMMY TALKS TO *HER* FLOWERS ALL THE *TIME*.

WE'RE HAVING A *PICNIC*.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME HAVE SOME SANDWICHES WITH ME AND MY MOMMY?

Out By Montauk, Dr. Donald Blake (no legit M.D; struck off) operating Cult of Thor (sp?)
-Thor apparently some Norse deity who Blake "channels"
-cultists live in cave system - Blake first "saw" Thor after eating fly agaric mushrooms in Scandinavia somewhere - fly agaric used by Vikings to send 'em into berserker rages — hallucinogen—

Church o/the Next Generation
-high priestess/manageress Emma Frost- children are legally adopted by Church from acolyte parents- kids undergo surgery to bring out "psychic abilities" — Frost takes "dowries" from parents to fund surgery —

Don't know where I am -- driven out to the desert in a noisy old bus with blacked-out windows.

QUINTANO CARNIVAL -- the last American freakshow -- rumors of high weirdness -- Paranormality.

Makeshift "Circus Ring" laid out on desert floor -- ugly people do their schtick for thin audience of uglier people.

Attractive woman does something illegal with a python for ten, fifteen minutes.

Hush comes over the place as the main attraction rides slowly into the ring.

"Saint John" or "Blaze", they call him -- lots of scarring on his face, dead eyes like a flagellant.

Moves slowly and carefully, like a concentrating child.

Like his fingers won't obey his brain without effort.

"Blaze", they called him.

"Saint John".

Getting old-- never saw it coming.

Never put it together.

The name, the scars, the deadness.

The thin, evil smell of gasoline and the lighter.

This was the last time Blaze did this stunt.

"Saint John" never survived.

But -- for hours after this shot, he rode around the desert, screaming.

Technically dead -- facial fat flying off his torched head like hot rain.

But still riding.

Screaming.

I THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND A SINGLE MISTAKE, A SINGLE ACCIDENT THAT LED TO IT ALL.

AND I **DIDN'T**. MAYBE WE'RE JUST LIVING IN THE WORLD OF **MURPHY'S LAW**--

--EVERYTHING THAT **CAN** GO WRONG, **WILL** GO WRONG--

IT'S NOT JUST ONE THING.

IT **ALL** WENT WRONG.

--WITHOUT EXPLANATION.

I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT. THE **BEST** I CAN DO IS TO SHOW PEOPLE WHAT THINGS **COULD** HAVE BEEN LIKE.

BEST **I** CAN DO IS GET SOME **SLEEP** TO MAKE SURE I'M STILL **ALIVE** TO **WRITE** THE GODDAMN BOOK.

I'M **SO** TIRED... AND THE **WORST** BIT IS STILL TO **COME**...

AND I DREAM OF MEN ON FIRE IN THE UPPER REACHES OF THE AIR, AND WOMEN IN FLIGHT, DANCING IN STILETTOS ON CLOUDS.

AND THE GOOD MEN COME AND DRAG PRESIDENT TRICKY FROM HIS RETIREMENT PALACE AND KICK HIM TO DEATH.

AND THEY SHOW PRESIDENT X WASHINGTON AND EVERYPLACE ELSE AND MAKE HIM CRY UNTIL HE PROMISES TO FIX IT ALL.

AND GOOD THINGS HAPPEN EVERY DAY.

AND WALKING IN THE STREET BECOMES LIKE GOING TO CHURCH FOR THERE ARE HIGH FASHION ANGELS IN THE SKY AND WE CLAP AND CHEER.

AND GOOD THINGS HAPPEN EVERY DAY.

OKLAHOMA; Militiamen taken into custody by police following reports of threatening behavior.

NO EXAGGERATION.

BRIEF INTERVIEW:
Unashamed Fascists (Monroe, right; "Hitler was a great man w/sad failings") with cannibal leanings, particularly in Creed (left).

"Bucky" Barnes, center, just spewed out sexual obscenities until sedated

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS...

"I KNOW YOU DON'T **APPRECIATE** VISITORS, MAJOR--

GRIMM

"--BUT I BELIEVE **ALICIA MASTERS** WROTE YOU TO **EXPECT** ME. I'M **PHIL SHELDON**-- FROM THE **BUGLE**."

NASA

ALL RIGHT, MISTER SHELDON. YOU GOT ME. I'M BEN GRIMM.

YOU WANT THE STORY? GET COMFORTABLE.

CIGARETTE?

SEE THE *RUSSIANS* FINALLY GOT A GUY UP LAST MONTH?

WOULDA BEEN *SOONER* BUT THE COMRADES RAN OUT OF *RUBBER BANDS.*

HEH.

ANYWAY. I WAS GETTING INTO *ENGINEERING* AT THE *CAPE,* LECTURING AT THE LOCAL *UNIVERSITY* THERE, *TOO.*

THAT'S HOW I MET *REED RICHARDS* AND THE *STORM* KIDS.

SCREW COMMUNISM

"HE WAS INTERESTED IN *ASTRAEA...*"

"... THE LINK BETWEEN THE **ORBITAL** CAPSULES **I** USED TO RIDE, AND THE APOLLO MOONSHOTS THAT'D **FOLLOW.**

"ASTRAEA'D BE A WORKHORSE THAT'D REALLY **FLY,** NOT JUST A BOX THAT WENT 'ROUND IN **CIRCLES.**

"RICHARDS WANTED TO STUDY **COSMIC RAY ACTIVITY** IN LOCAL SPACE, SOMETHING ORBITALS WOULD NEVER **REACH.**

"**ASTRAEA,** THOUGH BUILT AND FUELED, WOULDN'T BE READY TO **GO** TILL SIXTY-**FIVE.** RICHARDS DIDN'T WANT TO **WAIT.**

"HE TURNED UP AT MY HOUSE ONE NIGHT, **RAVING.**

"HE WANTED TO **STEAL** ASTRAEA, SHOW 'EM ALL THAT RED TAPE WAS **ANTI-SCIENCE.**

"WANTED **ME** TO **FLY** THE SHIP FOR HIM."

WE HAD A FIGHT. I DECKED HIM.

I TOLD HIM I WANTED TO PUT *LATERAL MOTORS,* ON ASTRAEA. IT'D TAKE *MONTHS* JUST FOR THE *MATH.* SHE *WASN'T READY.*

AND THE STUPID BASTARD DIDN'T HEAR A WORD I WAS SAYING.

REED TALKED SOME TENURE-HOUND FROM THE FACULTY CALLED *VON DOOM* INTO *FLYING* ASTRAEA.

AND THEY *STOLE* HER, *YEAH.*

THEY WENT *UP,* WITH THEIR WIDGETS AND ALL, TO RECORD COSMIC RAY ACTIVITY...

...INTO A *FLASHSTORM* OF *COSMIC RADIATION.*

IF ASTRAEA'D HAD DECENT *LATERAL MOTORS,* VON DOOM COULD'VE *MANEUVERED* THEM *AWAY* FROM IT.

Huh? THIS PICTURE?

THAT'S THE *STORM* BOY, THE FIRST ONE WE FOUND WHEN ASTRAEA CAME *DOWN.*

THE BOY *CAUGHT FIRE* AT *CELLULAR LEVEL* -- BURNED FROM THE *BONES* OUTWARD.

"THAT'S HIS **SISTER**. WHEN THE RECOVERY TEAM ARRIVED, SHE WAS **INVISIBLE**--**LIGHT-REFLECTIVE**.

"MADE HER **EYES** LIGHT-REFLECTIVE **TOO**, SO SHE WAS ACTUALLY **BLIND**.

"THEY DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS **THERE** UNTIL SHE **FELL** ON HER **BROTHER**."

YOU KNOW WHAT THE ***WORST*** OF IT IS?

DESPITE HAVING NO LATERALS... ***DESPITE*** THE FLASHSTORM...

VON DOOM? I NEVER GOT ANY PHOTOS.

THEY SAID HE WAS ***ANIMAL*** WHEN HE WENT ***UP***, AND ***MINERAL*** WHEN HE CAME ***DOWN***.

THEY ***SAY*** HE WAS WEARING HIS ***INTERNAL ORGANS*** ON THE ***OUTSIDE***.

I CAN'T HELP THINKING IT WOULDA BEEN ***DIFFERENT*** IF ***I'D*** FLOWN HER.

CAN'T ***HELP*** IT.

NEW YORK CITY.

MARVELS.

A GREEN MAN. A BODY THAT **STRETCHED** LIKE **RUBBER** BEFORE RIGOR MORTIS SET IN.

SILVER SPACEMEN AND INVISIBLE WOMEN.

MARVELS. THAT'S WHAT I'LL CALL THE BOOK.

I HAVE ALL THE NOTES, ALL THE INTERVIEWS.

I CAN **WRITE** THE BOOK, AND, PLEASE GOD, I CAN WRITE IT **QUICKLY.**

I WISH I HAD TIME TO REALLY **CRAFT** THE BOOK, MAKE THE CLEAREST AND BEST POSSIBLE **CASE** OF WHY THE WORLD WENT **WRONG.**

THE BIG SLEEP

THAT WEASEL KID **PARKER** STOLE THAT TIME FROM ME.

SO **HOT** TODAY. RAN OUT OF **PILLS** ON THE TRAIN **BACK**, HAVE TO STOP AT THE PHARMACIST LATER...

PARKER. PETER **PARKER**...

SO HOT. I HATE NEW YORK. STOP FOR A MINUTE.

PARKER. I ALWAYS HATED HIM. WEASELLY KID.

HAD TO BE PARKER, DIDN'T IT?

LOUSY PHOTOGRAPHER.

WORKED FREELANCE FOR THE BUGLE, PAYING FOR HIS COLLEGE TUITION AND KEEPING THAT POISONOUS OLD AUNT OF HIS.

A SCIENCE MAJOR. KNOW-IT-ALL WEASEL.

KID MESSED UP A COLLEGE EXPERIMENT. GOT BITTEN BY A SPIDER HE'D IRRADIATED.

GOT INFECTED. RADDLED WITH A RAGING MUTANT VIRUS.

GOT INFECTIOUS. VISITED THE BUGLE OFFICES BEFORE HIS RASH SHOWED...

CONTAGIOUS LITTLE WEASEL.

-Hk-

Oh--

-Hkk-

HKKKK

END.